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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1625  
INFO RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 8606  
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0177  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY  
RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000457

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD,  
SE/S-0,CA/OCS/ACS-NESA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2019  
TAGS: [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [SCUL](#) [SENV](#)  
SUBJECT: FLOODING UPDATE: THE TOLL RISES IN "JEDDAH'S  
KATRINA" (CORRECTED COPY)

REF: A. JEDDAH 0456  
[B](#). RIYADH 1278  
[C](#). JEDDAH 0342

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Classified By: Consul General Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: Reports continue of a mounting toll in terms of loss of life and property damage as a result of Wednesday's heavy rains and flash flooding in the Jeddah region (ref A). Saudi media highlight the flood devastation in front page stories. The public announcement that 83 persons are known to have died is accompanied by the expectation, confirmed by Governor of the Mecca Region Prince Khalid Al Faisal, that the toll may rise. There is suspicion that the casualty numbers are being deliberately understated to avoid alarming the population, with rumors suggesting the final death toll may reach into the hundreds. Around midnight yesterday the Consulate learned of the death of an American child in Wednesday's flood, and -- with weather reports being SMSed around Jeddah describing a 20-30% chance of further rain -- issued a warden message advising caution in the event of renewed rain and flash floods. There are also signs that the political "blame game" has begun, amid speculation that the Jeddah mayor and other municipal officials could be sacked. One Saudi businessman described the flood as "Jeddah's Katrina." END SUMMARY.

Hajj and flood stories double-billed  
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as SAG authorities respond  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Arabic and English media continue to highlight the flood devastation with graphic photos of piles of wrecked vehicles on the front pages of several papers today as well as pictures of residents of south/east Jeddah amid the rubble and debris of inundated homes and overturned cars. While the current official death toll is 83, the number is expected to rise. Accounts of the flood damage and complaints about Jeddah's poor drainage system share media space with the more positive and conventional Hajj and Eid al-Adha stories.

Business losses are estimated at SAR 1 billion, with at least 3,000 vehicles reported submerged or damaged. Saudi officials, including the Governor of Mecca Region, Prince Khaled Al Faisal, and the Governor of Jeddah, Prince Mishal bin Majed, were reported to have inspected the affected areas of Jeddah yesterday. Civil Defense authorities have established offices to dispense aid to flood victims. According to Al Arabiya TV, King Abdullah has issued orders for residents of south and east Jeddah displaced by the flood -- a mixture mainly of foreign workers and poorer Saudis -- to be placed on public assistance.

#### American child fatality

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¶3. (SBU) Around midnight yesterday post learned of the death of an American three-year-old child which occurred on Wednesday as the family was driving to Jizan on Eid holiday. Their car was engulfed by fast-moving water as they drove past the King Abdulaziz University in south Jeddah; in the effort to exit the vehicle the child was swept away. More than twenty-four hours later, following a search of area hospitals, the bereaved father finally located the child's body at the university hospital. He told our consular chief that he had seen "hundreds" of bodies, many of them children, at Jeddah hospital morques.

#### Anger at Jeddah municipality

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¶4. (C) At a Thanksgiving dinner last evening, prominent Jeddah attorney Kareem Nazir (strictly protect), son of

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retired, long-serving Saudi ambassador to Argentina, inveighed against the "incompetence" of officials surrounding Jeddah Mayor (Engineer) Adel Faqih who had failed to assure that the city had an adequate drainage system. He displayed photo after photo on his mobile phone of the flooded streets and underpasses of Jeddah and predicted the Mayor's own head would roll in a matter of weeks. "Personally I like the mayor," Nazir said, "but he is surrounded by incompetents. Mark my words that heads will roll over this." Nazir described his driver's narrow escape from death when his car was caught in turbulent floodwaters in an underpass where there was no storm drain; the driver broke a window to escape and swam to safety. Occupants of a small bus nearby were not so fortunate and are believed to have drowned. One U.S.-educated Saudi businessman, Walid Banawi (strictly protect), decried the chronic drainage problems in this cosmopolitan city of 3.5 million, calling the recent flood "Jeddah's Katrina."

#### Leaks at KAUST -- the final straw?

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¶5. (SBU) Flooding at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), 45 minutes north of Jeddah, mirrored the situation in the city. The newly-constructed student apartments at KAUST experienced leaks and the same drainage issues, puddles turning into lakes and roofs collapsing, as elsewhere in the region. The hotel where female students live was evacuated although many students were making the Hajj pilgrimage or were out of the country on holiday. The tape drives for Shaheen, the KAUST supercomputer, were reportedly damaged by the rains, although the computer itself survived. Several American students broadcast on their blogs that this could be the "final straw" for some students who had contemplated leaving after just one semester. One student estimated that the number of students departing after the

inaugural semester could be as high as 100, or 25 percent of the current student body at KAUST, and one third of the non-Saudis. Post believes the figure is probably an exaggeration since most students are committed for two years and there has been much discussion that with the weakness of the U.S. economy, finding jobs back home would be difficult now (refs B and C).

Cloudy skies, but so far

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no more rain in Jeddah

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¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Skies are mainly overcast, though with patches of blue, but residents of the affected areas of Jeddah are said to be anxious about the weather. So far there is no rain here on this the second day after what is being dubbed "The Wednesday Flood" and the first day of Eid al-Adha. Hajj rituals in Mecca continue smoothly and uninterrupted, amid occasional light rain showers. With the singular exception of the tragic drowning of the American child on Wednesday, no other flood-related problems have been reported among American citizens, residents or pilgrims, in the Kingdom's Western Region. Post transmitted by local telegram today a condolence message from Ambassador Smith to King Abdullah. END COMMENT.

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